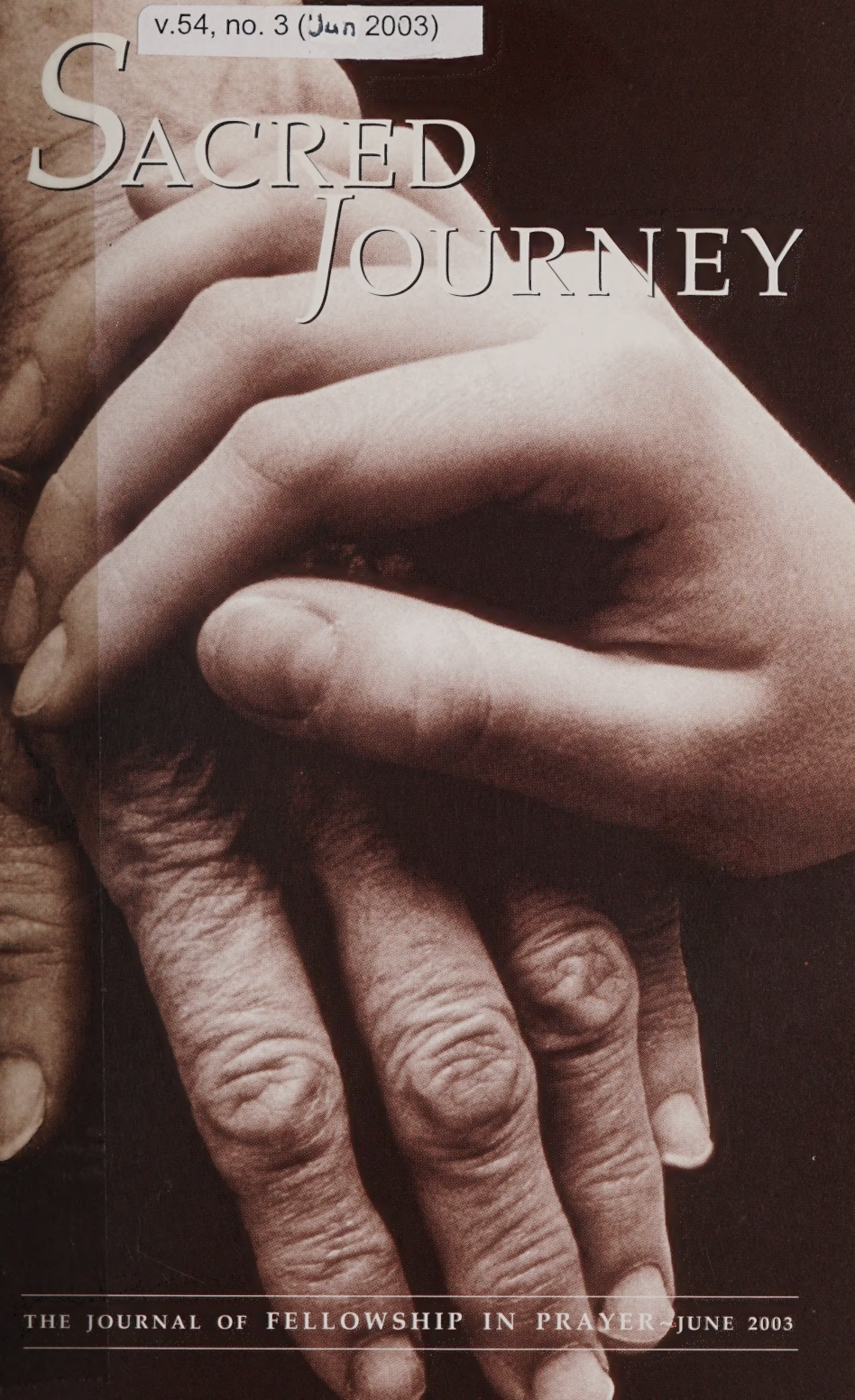


v.54, no. 3 (Jun 2003)

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THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER ~ JUNE 2003

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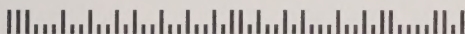
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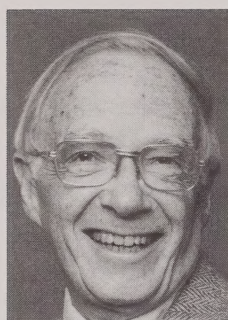
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LORD, MAKE ME AN INSTRUMENT OF YOUR PEACE



What can you and I do to help repair the world in this traumatic time? What can we do, as individuals, to help bring about the kind of peace within us that will radiate out from us into the world? The magnitude of the problems that confront us may well make us feel hopeless.

Members of the interfaith, not-for-profit group of friends who call themselves The Universal Third Order, however, have found strength and encouragement in trying to be "sensitive everywhere and always to the deep inner flow of life, the universal spirit, developing a loving harmony with it by following its leading in our lives" and celebrating "the one same universal essence found within every living being."

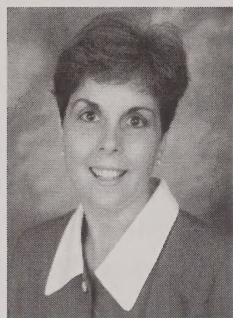
The women and men of the order "are bound together not by creed, dogma, or ritual but by the universal spirit which is within and beyond all religions." Cultivating the practice of living lightly

on the Earth, they “respect the different religious perspectives of others as true but limited, like our own.”

“Members follow self-determined spiritual paths in harmony with their own tradition and with the Way of the Order.” Like Fellowship in Prayer, this Way “emphasizes living from a spiritual center, living simply and joyfully, practicing reverence for all life and care of the Earth, welcoming diversity, and serving the spirit.” Living in this Way can help give us the faith we need to keep moving forward to a world of peace and loving kindness to all sentient beings.

For more information about The Universal Third Order, visit their website at www.universalthirdorder.org.

SMALL MOMENTS, TINY SHIFTS



Small moments and tiny shifts in perception often transform our lives. Once on a plane flight, a man seated next to me asked me whom I most admired. I mentioned Mother Teresa, Dorothy Day, and closer to home, I mentioned Connie, an older woman I know who is always stirring things up, taking someone in, and speaking her mind. The man said, "Sounds like the traits you describe are ones you might have in you, too."

He was right, of course. At that time in life, I was trying to say, "Don't look at me," when trouble hit or a problem surfaced. I wanted to live a quiet life and admire from afar those brave and intrepid souls who really changed things. Instead, this man helped me to accept that it was time to get involved with head, and heart, and hands.

In this month's interview biblical scholar Marcus Borg raises a profoundly important question, "What was your early image of God?" Borg remembers the tall, straight, towering pastor of the Swedish Lutheran Church of his childhood. Only after he uncovered his unexamined notion of God could he redraw what he knew about God to be in line with what he believes about God. Read Borg's interview, and better yet, delve into one of his books. *The God We Never Knew* is my personal favorite. Anne Strader continues with this same struggle in "Who is God to You?" She tells of her

own struggle to figure out what to call “a God I cannot name or think about in any specific way.”

Alicia Adams has a moment of reckoning in a tiny house on the edge of a Brazilian river. Robert Abplanalp comes face to face with his humanness alone in the Sierras of Northern California. Both find, in unexpected encounters, a mirror that reflects back the intertwined beauty and hungers of their own inner lives.

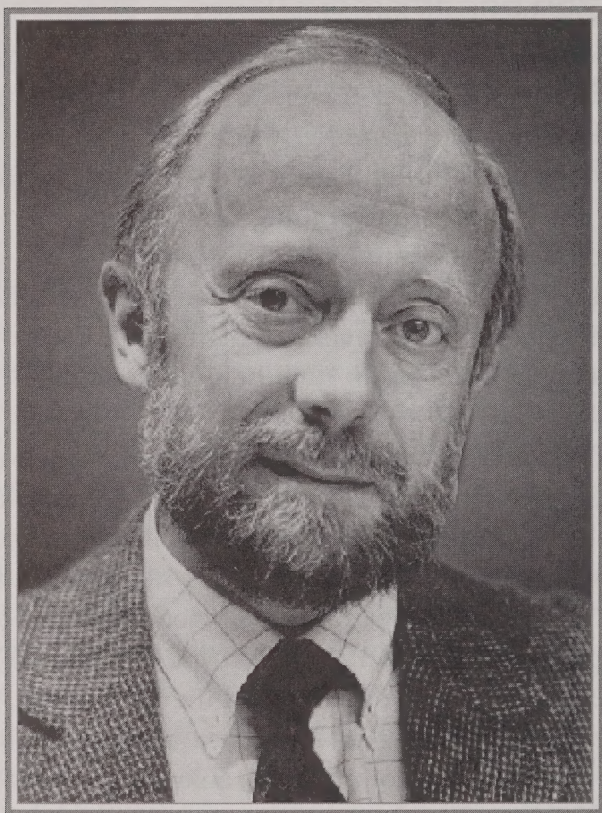
Ann Quinn sees God through the eyes of a nine-year-old boy, and Mary Chandler travels to Norway where viewing a statue triggers her memories of the last time she saw her parents together. Both of these writers see how the lifecycle fits into the eternal order of things.

If you are in a caretaking role that asks much of you, pray Deborah Hanus’ guided prayer, then read Rebecca Balcarcel’s poems. The prayer will remind you that you don’t serve alone, and the poetry will help you savor the “bright holiness of now.”

Finally, Sister Suzanne Toolan describes how a sung Taizé prayer service transformed her religious community and drew together hundreds of people from differing traditions by offering a “home for our restless hearts, minds, and bodies.” Her story is in part my story, too. I was one of those young pilgrims who came to Mercy Center south of San Francisco twenty years ago to sit on the floor, chant, and sit in silence before walking down the aisle to place my forehead on the cross and let go of my fears, anxieties, and pain. That place and that prayer service became my lifeline and helped create a place for silence in my own heart.

Small moments and tiny shifts redirect our lives. Don’t be surprised if an offhanded comment, an unexpected encounter, or the lyrics to a simple song stir something in you. That’s the way the holy often works.

Marcus Borg



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



Tell Me Your Image of God

Marcus Borg

Marcus Borg is Hundere Distinguished Professor of Religion and Culture in the Philosophy Department at Oregon State University and internationally known in academic and church circles as a biblical and Jesus Seminar scholar and author of eleven books including Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time; The God We Never Knew; The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions; God at 2000; Reading the Bible Again for the First Time. He sat down with SACRED JOURNEY writer Garnette Arledge last summer at Chautauqua Institute's "Path of Transformation: Exploring the Abrahamic Religions" where he was a featured lecturer.

Outside the open windows of Chautauqua Institute's Hall of Missions, the afternoon air was hot. A breeze lifted the simple white curtains. Hundreds of people strolled about, deep in conversation sparked by Professor Borg's afternoon lecture. At Chautauqua people sit attentively pondering the speaker's presentation and then spend hours conversing, with friends and strangers over what was said. The buzz was fruitfully incessant each time Borg spoke—as he intended.

SACRED JOURNEY: In your book *The God We Never Knew* you declare, "Tell me your image of God, and I will tell you your theology." How do you see our mental pictures impacting both the understanding and practice of faith?

Marcus Borg : Let's start with my early image of God. I felt sinful, guilty, and earnest for repentance from a law-giving, finger-shaking judge—God. In my book, although I change the name to protect the family, I describe the pastor of the Swedish Lutheran church I attended in my youth. He was tall, straight, towered over us in the high pulpit, always dressed in black robes. There was ritualized confession followed by absolution. Naturally the child's mind would assume this image for God. But now, the image that I choose is like a woman feeding her children. Yet I am also drawn to Meister Eckhart's understanding of the Divine, no image, nothing, no-thing.

How did your image of God change?

I was influenced by Dag Hammarskjöld's diary, *Markings*. As he went about his role as Secretary General of the United Nations, no one realized until his posthumous diary was found, that he lived in the world effectively but was a secret mystic. His book was important to me then as I struggled with my faith. Today, I sometimes address God as "You," right here, personal. Yet it is the Thomas Keating term, the 'is-ness' of God, God without limitation, the suchness of Spirit, the wind, the breath in Greek and Hebrew that is God to me. The Source.

You advocate for panentheism (everything-is-in-God) rather than 'supernatural' theism (God is above and beyond us). Explain what you mean and what difference these views make.

Supernatural theism is belief in a person-like being, separate from the universe, and is the prime cause of atheism. A-theism simply means not believing in a person-like being, separate from the universe. Supernatural

theism is a relative partial concept versus atheism's absolute rejection of everything concrete. I addressed this in my lecture today. You saw how carefully the audience listened to the distinction.

Yes, I did, I saw fascination on their faces as you drew such careful and precise distinctions. Yet I wonder if there is not a Transcendent Being in your world. When you pray, how, to whom, and why do you pray?

The 19th Century psychologist and philosopher William James made the distinction in his book *Varieties of Religious Experience*. There is God wholesale and God retail. In the retail version, God in the various traditions is personified, and the person praying is indebted. God wholesale is God of Being, abstracted, numinous (immanent, mystical presence). God becomes, in this type of prayer, the *mysterium tremendum* or simply God as the more.

In your book, you write, "Religious myth or sacred myths are stories about the relationship between the two worlds—the sacred and the world of our ordinary experience. In short, myth is a story about God and us." What does the 'myth' of Jesus tell us?

What Jesus tells us is about God and us together. God participating in suffering; God revealing the depth of God's love; the self-emptying of God and therefore of Jesus Christ. There are so many meanings. For me the meaning is John 3:16: For God so loved the world, he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Yet finally, after all the theological tenets you offer, you write that spirituality "is for the hatching of the

heart," a metaphor you borrow from Alan Jones and Frederick Buechner. What specific practices have helped you "hatch" a warm and active heart?

For me, hatching of the heart means good worship. You know my wife is an Episcopal priest in Portland where we live. For me the sacrament done well is a most reliable way to openness of the heart, in addition to prayer. Prayer transforms those who pray.

Other practices include thirty years of journal keeping. I must have 5000 to 6000 pages. I record my dreams and work with them in a Jungian framework.

Solitude is important to me. It is a function important to my personality, as I am an introvert.

You are speaking in the Jungian sense of introvert, yet I have observed you after you lecture surrounded by people. You seem most approachable—and to be enjoying the discussions.

(Laughing) That's easy. Introverts long to be the center of attention; just don't know how to do it. In the personal time with people after the talks, I am in charge of the situation, the audience knows me, easily the best situation for an introvert. And there is one more spiritual practice I would like to mention. I have two mantras that I say.

Would you be willing to share them with Sacred Journey readers?

Gladly. The first is "Lord have mercy on us."

The second is from Thich Nhat Hanh's book, *Living Buddha, Living Christ*. With the calm in-breath, I say mentally to a 4, 4, 5, 5 beat: "Lord Jesus Christ, Light of the World, fill my mind with peace and my heart with Love." Then I breathe out calmly in silence.

Who is God to You?



Anne Strader

Who is God to you? I found that attempting to answer that question required me to begin by defining for myself who God is not. The first image to go was the one I was given as a child being brought up in conservative Christian churches: the old man with the flowing white beard. God is neither old nor young, male nor female. God is not limited and cannot be defined by any of the labels we humans have used in our attempts to understand the Divine.



For me, God is not judgemental and punitive or exclusive in any way, rather loving and compassionate and welcoming to all. God does not punish but gives freedom of choice. When I choose unwisely and the results are difficult or painful, my image is that God weeps with me rather than having sat in judgement and “zapped” me for some wrongdoing.

The understanding that both genders are contained within God has been very healing and affirming for me. I

Anne Strader is Executive Assistant at The Academy at Swift River, a private therapeutic boarding program for adolescents in Western Massachusetts, and an occasional freelance writer. A spiritual seeker for many years, Anne is influenced by numerous sacred traditions.

realized quite a few years ago that discovering and reclaiming the feminine in God would be very important to me and only recently was reminded of this again as I listened to a chant called "Ancient Mother." The realization that God lives in me, a woman, swept over me again and touched me to the very core of my being.

But all those things that God is not do pose something of a problem for me. In letting go of all those old images, how then do I relate to God? What do I even call God? How can there be a personal relationship to a God I cannot name or think about in any specific way? It almost seems that God is so vast and mysterious that there is no way to even approach, let alone relate to, such a Being until I remember that, in addition to being Creator and Sustainer of the whole universe and everything within it, God is also the life force within me. Being created in God's image means to me that something of God exists within me, as close to me as it is possible to be. Now God does not seem so unapproachable.

I am so conscious of the Divine Light in all that is when I am out in nature, from the splendor of the mountains to the loveliness of my own garden. Remembering that I, also, contain a spark of "Godhood" is both humbling and empowering. Certainly I am an insignificant speck in relation to all that is around me, but that spark of God that dwells within me fills me with light and enables me to choose how I shall live in the world. I can choose at every moment to live from that Divine part of myself, and when I do, my life is richer and more meaningful.

Those times when it seems there may be a "dark" side of God, characterized by feelings of abandonment and absence, are the most difficult to accept. At such times, faith is all there is, faith that God is present there in my

darkness just as much as in my joy. In a world of paradox, to me this one is supreme.

Ultimately, all the words I can find to try and explain God are not enough, and I can only marvel that God Is/I Am.



Robert F. Campbell

P R A Y E R S



A Guided Prayer for Caregivers and Support Groups

Deborah Hanus

Leader: (Read slowly)

Begin to rest. Give yourself permission to be just where you are. Breathe, relax, breathe. Quietly enter into this moment.

Now, look at your hands. What is your immediate reaction?

Look at the backs of your hands, then at the palms. Breathe and relax in God's presence. Clench your hands, open them, shake them. Do this all again.

Hear God's Word: *Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him.* (Mt. 8:3)

Close your eyes and breathe. Rub your hands together and feel the heat. Let your hands rest in your lap. Breathe gently and consider how much your hands do. How faithful are your hands!

Deborah Hanus, D.Min., directs The Center for Spiritual Growth and the Contemplative Life in San Antonio, Texas.

Hear God's Word: *People even brought little children to him for him to touch them.* (Luke 18:15)

Open your hands as though to receive something.
Consider quietly in your own heart: What is it that I need God to give me at this time in my life?
Take some time to ask God for what you need and what you want. Do not be afraid to tell God of your need honestly, simply, without fear of being censored.

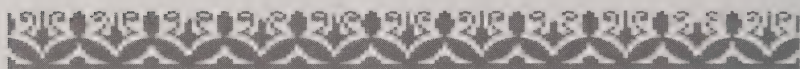
Hear God's Word: *I have carved you on the palm of my hand. Even if a mother were to abandon you, I never would.* (Isaiah 49:15-17)

Lift your right hand in a cupped position.
Consider the many ways you have given to others in the past few days, weeks, or months.
Now lift your left hand and cup your right hand in it.
This is God's hand supporting you. Relax your right hand into your left. Let it be supported, held, stroked.
Breathe. Allow yourself to imagine God as caring for, supporting, and loving you as you care for others.

Now, reach out your hands and clasp the hands of those seated near you. Feel the warmth or the coolness of their hands. Pray for those whose hands you hold that they too may know God's support in their lives.

Gently bring your attention back to the circle.

A TRANSFORMING EXPERIENCE



The Seer of My Soul

Alicia Adams

Into thy hands I commit my spirit. You
have redeemed my soul. ~Psalm 31:5



As the mosquitoes ravaged every inch of my body, I stared out the open window into the Brazilian sky wondering if I had made the right decision. Ten weeks in a foreign country away from family, friends, and home was a long time, even if it was God's work keeping me there. Mission trips were not new to me; I had traveled to many states teaching Bible School and working in churches. This time was different. This time, I was alone. After discovering the "shots" I had heard in the night had actually been fireworks after a *futbol* game, and after the enormous spider lurking on the windowsill had been taken care of by the young maid who answered my desperate scream for help, I no longer feared for my life and was ready to begin teaching English in the small church I had visited briefly the previous evening.

Alicia Adams is a high school English and Journalism teacher. Active in her church, she is currently an adult Sunday School leader. She earned her undergraduate degree from the University of Kentucky and her Master's degree from Georgetown College. She lives in Lexington with her two daughters.

Sitting on the crude benches just outside the one-room church, my students awaited my arrival with what appeared to be an energetic mix of fear and anticipation, emotions which mirrored my own. The children quickly surrounded me, offering chocolates in all shapes and sizes. The teenagers sat quietly, grinning and giggling whenever I could make eye contact. The few adults sat with eyes on the ground, glancing up quickly, flashing a shy smile and returning to their tacit, mature position. This nervous excitement carried us through the next ten weeks as we sang songs, learned the alphabet and talked about God's love. As I taught them simple English words and phrases, they taught me the same in Portuguese. I impressed mothers and church members with my mastery of the simplest greetings and novice attempts at conversation.

One day after class, a timid little girl with big brown eyes and a dirty face invited me to lunch. As we walked down the cobblestone streets past fruit vendors, and crossed the Rio Dolce, the little girl gradually picked up speed as we neared her house. She grabbed my hand and together we ran to the front door where her mother greeted us with open arms and a kiss for each cheek. I had visited many homes—those of the more affluent and those of the less fortunate. I had watched bugs crawl under (at least I told myself they were under) my clear plate as we ate. After the first few of these visits, I no longer asked my interpreter what we were eating. "You really don't want to know," or, "I'm not sure what the English word is," or, "Ask me tomorrow, after it's been digested." I'm not sure what I ate that summer, but the people who opened their homes to me satisfied a hunger I didn't even know I had.

The beauty inside this little house on the edge of the river was unmatched by all the others I had seen. Contentment on the faces of the family stood in sharp contrast to the dirt floors and meager furnishings of their two-room dwelling. I recognized the girl's father as the popcorn vendor who parked his cart outside the church each Sunday. He smiled and nodded his head toward a small table with three mismatched chairs as I thanked him for inviting me to his home. The mother insisted that I sit beside the little girl and her father was to sit across from us. She and the interpreter would dine on a mat beside the table. Although the meal (I'm still not sure what it

*He said
he could see
my soul. . .*

was) wasn't as fancy or as costly as some, the pride their joyous eyes expressed made it the grandest feast I had ever eaten. Her father asked me to pray for the family and for the food. I began to pray, pausing every few words to allow my interpreter to

translate into Portuguese. The father stopped my interpreter and asked for me to pray alone. As I prayed, I heard the father utter, "Gracias a Deus" ("Thank you, God"). When I said, "Amen," he said something to me I've never forgotten. He told me that he didn't need my prayer interpreted because as I prayed he could see my soul and the Spirit of God surrounding me. Unable to utter a single word, I simply smiled and wiped the tears that flowed from my eyes. Neither English nor Portuguese provided me the words to describe how I felt. It was an experience beyond the limits of any language, any culture. His words comfort me even today. Our world is cluttered with pretenses and expectations which cloud our ability to envision an individual's inner self. As I unknowingly

exposed this part of me, I discovered a feeling of completeness, an understanding of who I really am and what it means to be a child of God. As I face the difficulties this life deals me, I often seek refuge in the simple words of the man who witnessed the emergence of who I am today.

I L L U M I N A T I O N S



Place yourself as an instrument in the hands of God who does his own work in his own way.

~*Swami Ramdas*

Just as there is no loss of basic energy in the universe, so no thought or action is without its effects, present or ultimate, seen or unseen, felt or unfelt.

~*Norman Cousins*

God expects but one thing of you, and that is that you should come out of yourself in so far as you are a created being and let God be God in you.

~*Meister Eckhart*

Sages speak of the immutable Tree of Life, with its taproot above and its branches below.

~*Sri Krishna*
(*Bhagavad Gita*)

Have patience with all things,
but chiefly have patience with yourself.
Do not lose courage in considering your own imperfections,
but instantly set about remedying them—
every day begin the task anew.

~*St. Francis de Sales*

Where IS God? Wherever you let God in.

~Hasidic Saying

If a man who enjoys a lesser happiness beholds a greater one, let him leave aside the lesser to gain the greater.

~The Buddha

Those whose consciousness is unified abandon all attachment to the results of action and attain supreme peace. But those whose desires are fragmented, who are selfishly attached to the results of their work, are bound in everything they do.

~Sri Krishna

(Bhagavad Gita)

My life is an indivisible whole, and all my attitudes run into one another; and they all have their rise in my insatiable love for mankind.

~Mahatma Gandhi

The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the eyes of others only a green thing that stands in the way.

~William Blake

To display His eternal attributes
In their inexhaustible variety
The Lord made the green fields
of time and space.

~Jami

The Grace of God is a wind which is always blowing.

~Sri Ramakrishna

P O E T R Y



Opening A Window

Rebecca Balcarcel

Lifting the sash,
she leans out slowly,
face full to sun,
then head and shoulders, then
torso, all the way to her waist—
leaning into sunshine, warm air,
into toast-colored light.
She is lifting her arms,
opening her hands,
tilting her chin, she is
praying.

Rebecca Balcarcel's poetry has appeared in Clockwatch Review, Aura Literary Review, South Dakota Review, Concho River Review, White Heron, and elsewhere. She is a MFA student of Bennington College, the recipient of their Jane Kenyon Scholarship, and the mother of three young boys, two of whom are twins. She writes in the middle of the night.

Watching Two-Year-Old Twins

Eat Watermelon

It is something like
water spilling over a brim
sunlight dripping between leaves;
it is like giggling,
like hearing tiny bells,
eyes blinking
in the bright holiness of now.

PILGRIMAGE

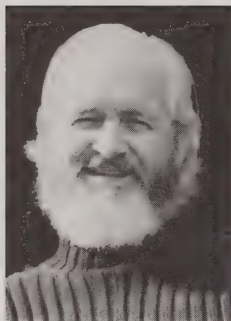


An Amateur's Retreat into the Woods

Robert Abplanalp

Solitude—when you get saturated with silence and landscape, then you need an interior work, psalms, scripture, meditation. But first the saturation.

~Thomas Merton



A crescent moon hangs askew amongst thousands and thousands of stars, barely lighting the dark Indian Valley (named for the Mountain Maidu Indians) and the campsite I've come to. It's too dark to actually see the forested Northern Sierras surrounding the valley, or their wind-scarred fragmented peaks, but their towering presence envelops me like the presence of God I felt once in the doorway of a San Francisco basilica. Tall grasses dance in the cool, night breeze, their silhouettes waving just beyond the pool of light from my little trailer.

It's the first night of my retreat into the woods. I've come here for solitude, distancing myself from exhausting academic work and a frenzied suburban lifestyle in Northern California. I'm hoping to rediscover my Maker. As noted theologian and author A.W. Tozer writes, "Deep

Robert Abplanalp is a tenured professor at a small college in Scotts Valley, California.

calls unto deep . . . the soul senses its origins and longs to return to its source." In the process, this week, I hope to rediscover my authentic self.

Opening the trailer door, I step down and ease a few feet into the darkness, shining my flashlight's narrow beam in a wide circle around the campsite. I'm nervous that the light might pick up the gleaming eye of a cougar. Even poet/farmer Wendell Berry says of the woods, "These are haunted places, or at least it is easy to feel haunted in them, alone at nightfall." I quickly relieve myself, shudder and go back inside.

It takes me three full days to acclimate to the woods. The daily pace I adopt is restful. Waking at the chirps and twitters of robins and sparrows (at the faintest sight of dawn) I get up, fix coffee, then lie back down to read the Psalms. This morning I unexpectedly come across fitting words:

. . . When my spirit grows faint within me,
it is you who know my way.
I cry to you, O Lord; I say, 'You are my refuge,
my portion in the land of the living.
Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need . . .
(Psalm 142)

Like a hammer breaking a rock, the passage causes something inside me to crumble. A confession of my failures and worries erupts in desperate words and visceral moans. I can't help myself and don't hold back my tears. Finally, after what seems like twenty or thirty minutes, a deep, uncluttered peace comes, followed by much-needed sleep.

The following day, I thumb through the scriptures to find an enormously helpful passage: "During the days of

Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death . . ." The mere image of the son of God suffering such solitary, intense anguish alleviates the isolation and awkwardness I feel in admitting my weakness.

I eat lightly, walk, and take naps as often as I want. I'm more acutely tuned to what's going on around me. The fear of chancing upon a bear or cougar has subsided. Still, I stay alert but have little anxiety, nor do I intend to track any animal for the sake of curiosity. I do my best not to intrude.

A doe and her two fawns graze mornings and evenings on leaves from a willowy brush near the river bank not far from my trailer. Today they warily stare at me, yet keep pulling down leafy branches without bolting in fear. I don't allow our eyes to meet. Walking away from the deer, I avoid trespassing on their turf and feel more a part of the woods for doing so.

It's mid-afternoon, black clouds gather and a wind has come up from the east. I hear it whirling, building, agitating the great oaks and pines towering above the camp. Then it's calm. The wind has suddenly shifted its direction, rushing now from the southern end of the valley with great force. It blows wildly through the camp, inflicting itself on everything in sight. I pull the trailer door closed, locking it from inside, and roll the Venetian windows shut. I even twist shut the air vent on top of the roof to keep it from being torn off. And the rain comes.

The wind-driven storm lasts most of the night. I feel like a cork in a raging sea, or like Noah sealed up in the ark. I think about what I instinctively accepted years ago as a child: that darkness, wind and storm, like untamed tigers, hold mysteries greater than my understanding. God simply does what he pleases.

Though my little trailer is being shaken, still I'm intrigued by the figurative language of the Psalmist's words, (God) parted the heavens and came down; dark clouds were under his feet. He mounted the cherubim and flew; he soared on the wings of the wind. He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him—the dark rain clouds of the sky. (Psalm 18:9, 10)

I don't feel defenseless before this seemingly unbridled, chaotic world. On the contrary, I only wonder for what



Robert F. Campbell

purpose he's riding in such a hurry, and throughout the night offer spontaneous praise like, "O my God, my God, how fantastic are your works!" or, "How easily the earth responds to your touch."

This morning I want something hot for breakfast so I heat up a can of beans, toast an English muffin, wash off a green-stemmed onion, and boil coffee. Perfect. I'm being rejuvenated. I didn't think it could happen, but the solitude, the scripture, prayer and simplicity are making it possible.

Later, out walking, I pause for a few minutes, resting both hands on top of my walking stick. A breeze blows, causing my beard to billow and flutter like a flag or small white sail. I inhale the scent of evergreen pines, and of a nearby meadow bearing white, rose-like, thickly scented flowers. I accept the gifts of the breeze, the forest, and the meadow. I'm only doing what the rest of the animal kingdom does (and possibly what the Mountain Maidu Indians did); I'm merging with my given surroundings.

I'm also adding to the woods another aspect of my Maker's glory, the presence of my own humanness, a tangible reality I've ignored for years.

The end of the week comes too quickly. Standing on the side of the road in a grimy telephone cubicle, barely lit by the lesser light of the moon and stars, I hear the loneliness in my wife's sweet voice. I know it's time to go back. Hanging up the phone, I hesitate for a long moment, then decide to pack up in the morning and head home, finishing my retreat.

Darkness has descended upon the Indian Valley. I listen from inside the trailer to the faint yapping of coyotes somewhere far away, and with the exception of the quick scratchy strokes of my pen, all is quiet.

SPIRITUALITY & THE FAMILY



Beach Presence

Ann Quinn

The beach at twilight in late June was quite still. The ocean's waves had diminished into gentle swells, almost flat against soft gray-blue sky. The moist air was warm and breezy, not the stiffer, saltier, steadier winds which pressed against our bodies while walking the beach in the afternoon.

After walking for half an hour, I sat down on the flat, ocean-packed sand at the crest of high-tide sand pack, absent-mindedly trying to limit the amount of scratchy Long Island sand actually touching my body. I was deeply absorbed in the wonder and presence of this moment with Gavin.

My just-nine-year-old grandson, entranced with his initial exploration of the water's edge, was silhouetted against the edge of his spot of beach, touching the Atlantic Ocean, all held in the enormous globe of the sky. Almost numinous—the soft, muted colors of the late-in-the-day moist air enveloping beige sand, seashells and rocks, and the thousand shades of blue-gray turquoise-

Ann Quinn is a Trustee of Fellowship in Prayer, a spiritual director, an Associate of Holy Cross Monastery, a retired corporate executive, and a widow actively involved with family, friends, and three grandchildren.

green ocean flowing into sky with no specific cloud shapes. Simply overflowing, enormous space. We were quite alone in this quiet, spacious place . . . few other people at this hour. Still alert and peacefully energetic toward the close of a wonderful day, it was “Heart as Wide as the Sky” space (a title of a favorite Sharon Salzberg book).

Nine is an amazing age, or, the real truth: this boy is the most amazing being ever! Curious and adventurous. Smart and already knowledgeable enough to ask unending difficult and deep questions. Loving and openhearted. He knows that I adore him and both our hearts are wide open now. The men in his family have hearts available to themselves, to close-in-others like Grandma, and to their God.

This child prays—before meals, before sleeping. Prayers of gratitude for the Patriot’s baseball game won in the bottom of the ninth inning. For hitting a hole-in-one on the 18th hole of miniature golf. For making his own scrambled eggs. Then, hands bowed against his heart, he offers prayers for forgiveness of sin, and for love and safety for his Mommy and Dad and sister Abigail.

He went to yoga class with me—to learn more about the “mountain” pose where, arms stretched overhead and feet planted firmly on the ground, we awake to the flow of heaven streaming into us and earth’s grounded strength flowing up into our body. There was a great “oh”, actually from each of us, when the connection between Jesus’ prayer “Thy will be done, on earth as in heaven” took shape in yet another real way.

This week is the fourth anniversary of his Grandfather’s death. The twelve years I had with Jim was one of the deepest gifts of my life. I’d always wanted to know about love, and had been painfully unaware of the truth of love. It wasn’t something I could command, or

manipulate, or get someone to give me so that I would love myself. It was a gift from others to me. Only once a personal relationship with the God of my understanding had begun to awaken, was love something that I could learn to offer to others. Jim and I gave each other healing sanctuary from the earlier wounds of our lives. We loved each other deeply, and well. The life we shared was my heart's deepest desire. It's ending was my greatest fear.

Gavin asks question after question about Grandpa. Gavin knows I love to tell these stories . . . and right now, he loves to listen to them. Grandpa was an elegant, wise, funny, light-hearted, and deeply loving man who knew about fear and who loved God with all his mind, heart, and soul. He lived fully, until the very last moment, when he died, after a short illness, peacefully and full of God's presence at home.

I'd never had my own children. Never had there been enough trust of myself, no less of another person, to dare to bring a life into this dark, dangerous, and painful life. Jim had three—mostly grown by the time we married. The oldest, Jim-Jim, is the father of my grandson, and the one with whom I am closest.

It's a huge blessing to create friendly, supportive mentoring space—when Jim-Jim wants it. I've struggled myself with the enormous costs of becoming affluent through "success" in Corporate America. I deeply respect this family's recent choice to return to northern Idaho where a magnificent environment and a small community offer a simple and modest life-style in which to raise the children and thrive themselves

I am quite aware that time with Gavin is the passage of love from one generation to the next, an enormous gift of The Holy One's Presence. This is my joy, my contribution

to immortality—and very much this widow's living gift to her beloved husband. Fifty years from now, may Gavin remember the love we shared in twilight-beach-presence moments like this, filled with wonder, connectedness, and loneliness. Better yet, let him know God's love that flows within him and live his life, each moment, from that space, passing love along from generation to generation.



Robert F. Campbell

BOOKS WE'VE ENJOYED



Soul Sisters: The Five Sacred Qualities of a Woman's Soul
by Pythia Peay. Published by Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam,
2002. Paperback, 235 pages. ISBN: 1-58542-162-6.
Reviewed by Karen Elkins.

Soul Sisters is a book for every woman. Divided into six chapters, this “inspirational workbook” for women focuses upon the five sacred qualities found within every woman: courage, faith, beauty, love, and magic. The final chapter deals with the importance of finding and establishing a relationship with a “soul sister.” A soul sister is a close friend who can assist you in maintaining your faith. She will encourage you during your worst trials and inspire you in your spirituality. She will be the “Keeper of Your Faith” when you most need to be uplifted.

The author uses anecdotes, quotes, exercises, and recommended readings and music to present the quality being addressed. From getting in sync with the phases of the moon to writing about your most courageous act, the exercises will enlighten and inspire any woman. You will learn valuable lessons from women, past and present. You will search deep within yourself to discover beliefs, traits, and abilities that have been hidden or simply suppressed and denied.

Karen Elkins is working on the last two courses for her M.A. in Creative Writing. She plans to continue with her Ph.D. and teach online. She lives in New Mexico.

This workbook will bring encouragement, enlightenment, and wisdom to any woman. It is a most valuable source of inspiration and spiritual renewal. It is an asset to be used over and over. Every woman should have a copy to reach for during trying times. It will comfort your soul and lift your burdens.

I highly recommend this workbook. Buy a copy for yourself and several to give to relatives and friends. Perhaps you could even form a group to share the exercises and discuss the lessons. Apply the lessons to your life and observe the changes. I was so impressed with *Soul Sisters* that I ordered a copy for my mother as soon as I finished reading it. It should be required reading for all girls in high school. It is high time to put femininity back into spirituality. Pythia Peay is a journalist. She has written for *Utne Reader*, *Washingtonian*, *Common Boundary*, and *Religion News Service*.

SPIRITUALITY & AGING



The Life Cycle

Mary Chandler

I entered the front gate at Vigeland Park in Oslo, Norway thinking about my Scandinavian father. Since Dad's death, I've blocked out his last few years. I haven't wanted to remember an old man caring alone for his much younger wife. I've been angry that he hid the truth of their situation for so long.

Of the more than six hundred figures in the park, Gustav Vigeland, (1869-1943) modeled the one hundred and ninety-two full-sized sculptures by himself. The project took nineteen years.

Vigeland's nude figures depict the cycle of life. In these sculptures, children frolic together. A father plays with his babies—three on his outstretched hands and shoulder; one balancing on his foot. A grandfather holds his grandson's hand, their eyes locking. A teenager fingers strands of her hair and dances. A mother and father, arms entwined, hold their baby. Another mother, on all fours, gives her two smiling children a ride on her back. Her long braided hair is pulled across her mouth, like a horse

Mary Chandler's work has been widely published in national magazines, newspapers, literary journals, and on the Internet. She is a retired teacher who loves opera, travel, visiting with family and friends, and a "good read." She lives in Rancho Santa Fe, California.



Mary Chaudler

bit. I can almost hear *giddyup* as her son tugs her braids. Arms wrapped around her brother's waist, his sister giggles. A father cradles his tiny baby on his shoulder. A little boy hugs his bearded grandpa's neck.

I'm completely caught up in this depiction of life. My eyes mist as I think about my own childhood and about the legacy of love my parents left their twelve children.

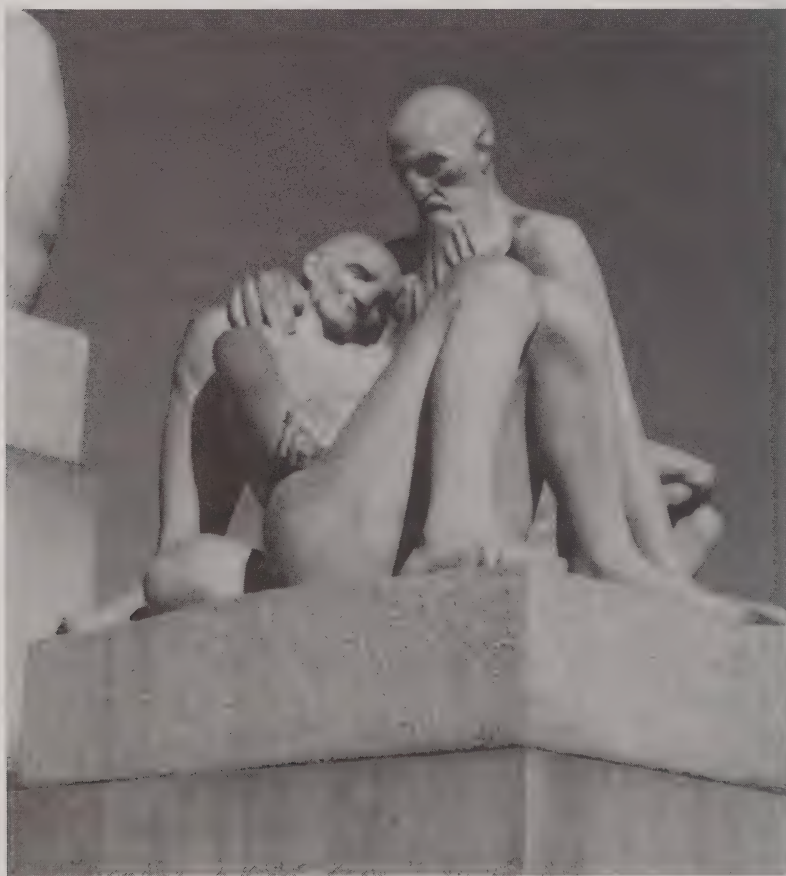
And then I see them—the old ones. An old woman, her hair drawn back in a bun, kneels sideways beside a younger man, her arm on his shoulder. Her body shows the ravages of time. The man sits facing forward, his knees drawn up, his face away from hers, one elbow on his knee. His chin rests in his hand.

I am reminded of my mother's long struggle with Alzheimer's disease. "What day is it?" she would ask, over and over again. "Is this the day we're going to..." Where they might be going, she had no idea. She talked incessantly. Nothing made sense. All the while, my patient, elderly father listened and answered all her questions kindly, again and again. Years before, Mother, who was eighteen years younger than Dad, became his third wife and the instant mother to five girls whose mothers had died. She gave birth to four boys and three more girls. Their family, my parents always said, was God's greatest gift.

This Vigeland sculpture makes me think about how difficult it must have been for Dad during those later years. I can almost see him sitting beside me in the same pose, wondering, thinking, worrying. He was nearly ninety. What if he died first? Who would look after Mother? So many "little things" needed tending to: bathing her, accompanying her everywhere so she could find her way home; cooking, cleaning, searching for lost

keys, keeping their clothes presentable. I never knew, never realized how much this dear man gave of himself. None of us did—until much later. Remembering, I feel a lump in my throat.

In the next sculpture, a bald, bearded old man sits facing forward, his knees spread apart, drawn up. His arms hold another frail old man, his eyes shut, his head against the bearded man's shoulder, his leg meeting his friend's. The bearded man looks down, his fingers curling around his friend's neck. The tenderness touches my heart.



Mary Chandler

I close my eyes, remembering the last time I saw my parents together in their home. My father propped his cane beside the sofa, knelt down, and tenderly, lovingly, kissed my sleeping mother's cheek. She didn't stir. When he got up, tears streamed down his wrinkled cheeks. For a long time he didn't speak.

"Take care of her after . . . I'm gone," he whispered, pulling his white hankie from his pocket and wiping his hazel eyes. "I'm doing what I need to do." His lips quivered. "Someday, a loving Father will make her whole again."

Here in Vigeland Park, I finally understand. During those last years my mother was not a burden to be shared. My father willingly served and sacrificed, believing that God, in infinite mercy, would someday give him back that beautiful woman he had called "Bright Eyes" for almost fifty years. For Dad, the life cycle was eternal. So was love.

I pause a moment longer on this sunny afternoon—to give thanks to God for life, for love, and for a heart finally at peace.

SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY



A Taste of Taizé

Suzanne Toolan, RSM

In 1977 one of the Burlingame Sisters of Mercy returned from a trip to France. She brought with her a recording from the ecumenical Community of Taizé. It took me several weeks to get around to playing that record but it took just moments to realize that I had come home! I had discovered *my* music, music that spoke the prayer of my soul.

Then in 1981 two Burlingame Sisters of Mercy, Jean Evans and Judy Carle, joined the many young people who converged upon the small ecumenical Community of Taizé in Southeastern France. They returned to Burlingame, having interested some of the Brothers in spending time with us here for a young adult gathering.

Thus opened for our Center a vital ministry, and for me, a wonderful way of praying through music. It has become in my elder years a way of bringing together important strands in my life: prayer, a certain skill in making music, and love for young people.

A prolific composer, Suzanne Toolan is best known for her hymn "I Am the Bread of Life" which has been spread throughout the world and has been translated into about 20 languages. Much of her work is now with the gentle prayer and music of the ecumenical community of Taizé. She has been instrumental in starting this prayer in many locations throughout the United States. Sr. Suzanne continues to lead retreats and workshops and was the first director of Mercy Center in Burlingame, California.

To understand the impact of the Community of Taizé one needs to go to this little village situated on a hillside in southeastern France. And if it is during the summer months there is incredible inspiration to be had as one becomes a part of the huge numbers that converge there during student break.

For they come from all over Europe; they come from Asia, Africa, from North and South America. They come to meet one another, to pray, and to discover a way of life. The village? Taizé, a rather insignificant site to have attracted so many young people for so many years. Taizé, situated within a few miles of a monastery at Cluny, a Roman Catholic institution, once the most influential and wealthiest monastery in Europe. How extraordinary that within a short distance of this former powerhouse another “monastery” would spring up years later, one whose members would live in such simplicity that they would renounce even their own patrimony.

What attracts young (and not so young) people to Taizé? I think that it is threefold: the integrity of the Brothers’ lives, the beauty of their worship, and the inspiration of their message, a message that encourages the young to live in solidarity with the poor and disenfranchised and to be bearers of peace and reconciliation.

The Brothers wear habits only in church; their dress at other times is very ordinary, very simple. There is a sort of romanticism that attracts young people as they see these white-cloaked figures assemble in the large church at Taizé. I can remember a like superficial attraction when I was in college at Immaculate Heart in Hollywood. The sight of black and white clad young women gliding down chapel aisles led me to fantasies about my own future involvement

with these Sisters who, I envisioned spent all their time either praying or teaching fascinating college music courses to enthralled students.

Is it a wonder that the counter-cultural quality of the Brothers' lives fascinates our society, immersed as we are in the culture of consumerism, a culture that seeks immediate gratification in most arenas of our lives?

A unique element in the Community of Taizé is that the Brothers come from different Christian faith traditions. Anglicans, Lutherans, Roman Catholics, and men from various Protestant traditions are numbered among Taizé membership. Most of the Brothers live in Taizé but others live in very poor areas of the world. Brother Roger, the founder, stays in one of these impoverished areas for a time each year to write a letter to the young entitled "Letter

*The hills
of Taizé
resounded
with beautiful
music.*

From Taizé." (Available on the Internet at <http://www.Taizé.fr>) This letter becomes the focus of study and a source of inspiration to visitors of this little village and to the world-wide communities the Brothers visit throughout the year.

The Sisters of St. Andrew, a seven-hundred-year-old Order, have begun to play an important role in the welcome of the young people. At first the Sisters did many of the menial tasks connected with the welcome: preparing food, doing laundry, etc. It didn't take long for the Brothers to discover the value of having the Sisters share other parts of their ministry. Now Sisters meet one-on-one with young women sharing their own search. They prepare and rehearse the chants used in the prayer, and

some of the Sisters give Bible presentations, talks that lead to prayer. The Sisters I have met have given superb presentations and, indeed, have helped me to pray.

A week at Taizé during the summer months will include prayer three times a day, the unfolding of scripture by Brothers or Sisters, and meetings in various language groups. The purpose of these groups is to enable participants to discover ways to be messengers of hope as they return home to their own environment of family, school, or work. The week also includes some manual work; each person assists in some way with the daily chores of keeping this multitude of young adults (sometimes as many as 6000 in a week) functioning as a community.

But what of the worship itself? The prayer is composed of repetitive chants, scripture reading, silence, and intercession. During the "Friday Evening Prayer Around the Cross," those assembled also have the opportunity of coming to the icon cross a few moments to pray. The tradition of Taizé is to kneel and place one's forehead upon the cross, thus releasing to Christ all that is in one's heart.

One summer as the Brothers were trying to find a way to make the young people an active part of the prayer, someone started singing the Praetorius, "Jubilate Deo." It is said that the hills of Taizé resounded with this beautiful canon. It became a prototype of the many chants that were to follow, chants that have touched the hearts of people on every continent. The repetition of the chant often leads to deep prayer, a sort of a communal *Lectio Divina*.

Jacques Berthier, organist and choir director of St. Ignatius in Paris, began to collaborate with Brother Robert, medical doctor, musician, and one of the first members of the community. Together Berthier and Brother Robert

composed *ostinato* responses and chorales, litanies, acclamations and canons, functional music of great simplicity and beauty. Well-crafted, the chants are able to “bear the mystery,” not becoming threadbare despite endless repetition. (One small defect in Berthier’s writing is the misplacement of the Latin accent. Berthier never quite understood Latin accents. Thus we hear such phrases as *Gloria tibi Domine*, throwing the accent on the last syllable. A small defect when one considers the overall value of this music.)

The prayer of Taizé that has most often been transplanted to other countries is the beautiful “Prayer Around the Cross.” In the San Francisco Bay Area with which I am most familiar, there are many churches and chapels that provide this prayer monthly. Here at Mercy Center in Burlingame we started with fifteen people in attendance in 1982. Although we have never advertised the prayer, people come from over one hundred miles away, battling Friday bridge traffic, to attend prayer on the first Friday of every month. Our seating capacity is about 300 but with floor overflow we come close to five hundred. Five hundred people gathered to close off a busy week, five hundred people who value the silence, the deep prayer, the community, the sometimes quiet, sometime exuberant chanting—people who want to lift up in prayer their own needs and the crying needs of our world, of our universe, to a merciful God.

“Stay here and keep watch with me; the hour has come. Stay here and keep watch with me; watch and pray.” This simple phrase might start an evening. It may take yet another chant as transition from busy work and family life, from traffic noise, from inner clutter to still the mind and heart. Perhaps we might continue with,

"Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est." Then we hear the ancient psalmody, so much a part of Jewish and Christian tradition. As the cantor sings verses of a psalm, the people respond with a simple alleluia. Then we are ready to hear the word of God. The passage, purposely short so that we may hold it in silent prayer, is read in the dominant language of the group; short phrases are often repeated in other languages, then a responsive chant, and then, the heart of the prayer, a silence of at least five to ten minutes.

Silence, hard for our culture to take? Indeed it is. When I first introduce this prayer to groups in the Bay Area and in other places, I sometimes cut the silence a bit short because people are so uneasy with it. But silence, a resting-place with God, is something that grows on us. We find home for our restless hearts, minds, and bodies. Then from out of silence comes a quiet chant followed by intercessions. Borrowing from the Eastern Church we respond: *"Kyrie eleison"* or sometimes *"Gospodi pomilui"* in a Slavic tongue (Lord, have mercy).

The cross is placed upon small stools on the floor and as we continue to chant, people are invited to bring their burdens, their worries, their anxieties, and the burdens of the world to the icon cross. As in Taizé, people may leave quietly when they need to, but the gathering around the cross continues until everyone has the opportunity to come to the cross. Often when I pick up the cross after the service I am aware of all the fears, the anxieties, the pain that has been left there. I am also conscious of the peace that has been found at that cross.

At Mercy Center we have the custom of singing a song of resurrection at the end. It is the Risen Christ with whom we have gathered and so we end consciously in that risen

life. Christ has risen, is present among us, and leads us back into our ordinary life, ready to live the mystery.

I wrote the chant, "Jesus Christ, Yesterday, Today and Forever" for the papal visit to San Francisco in 1987. One evening at our Taizé service I decided to give it a try as a resurrection close to our evening. I found that the people immediately took up the singing with great enthusiasm. Not only that, they all stood and held hands. This immediately became a custom for us, a custom that greatly irritates the Brothers. For awhile after the Brothers registered disapproval I tried to stop this action but

an elderly United Methodist minister said, "Why? This is *our* custom now as Mercy Center pray-ers; if we want to stand as one in Christ, why not?"

I always like to bring the exuberance of the resurrection song back down again so that people may begin to leave in quiet. We sing, "Now

in peace, O God, let your servant go, alleluia, for my eyes have seen your salvation, alleluia" an adaptation of "*Nunc dimittis*" from the Taizé repertory.

A part of our evening has become the greeting of one another in the lobby area after the service. Here old friends meet and exchange happenings from the previous month and good wishes for the coming month.

The Brothers insist rightly that Taizé is not a movement; they wish to avoid any semblance of a cult. They are also ambivalent about the use of their prayer in settings other than Taizé; it is their prayer. On one hand they encourage



others to make the prayer available but they are reluctant to have it known as “Taizé Prayer.” We speak of it as prayer using the music of Taizé.

Until the opening up of Eastern Europe we were privileged to have the Brothers for a weekend every year. Now we are glad when they can make it every other year.

Our weekends are one of the high points of the year. In addition to our 90 bedrooms, we open up some of our larger meeting rooms to accommodate the crowds with sleeping bags to enable young people to be housed inexpensively.

Sometimes I have regrets that I no longer compose the amount of music that I did when I had as many as five choirs for which to write. I have no choir now and I feel that absence. What an experience of God it has been to facilitate the coming together of mind and heart and voice in some precious moments of making music, of singing texts that express the multiplicity of human emotions: joy, sorrow, sadness, playfulness, exultation.

I find that I am often writing simple one-liners that don’t require a lot of skill for a musician. But often, for me, they express the simplicity of praying to God with few words but with words that upon repetition lead to silence.

I remember as a college student, before I entered the Sisters of Mercy, having this intuition one day. (I don’t think I really understood it at the time; maybe now I am beginning to penetrate its meaning.) It is this: Where words leave off or become inadequate to express the power of the mystery, there music takes over, expressing a thought or feeling or prayer in a manner beyond words. And where music itself is inadequate, there is silence.

For the past two years a few of our Sisters and Associates have gone to San Quentin to facilitate Centering Prayer. We have been so touched by the men’s response to Taizé chant

and even more, by their response to the silence of contemplative prayer. As one of the men put it early on in our time with them: "Now I get it! It's like the Bible says, 'We don't know how to pray but the Spirit prays in us in ways beyond words!'"

For these incarcerated men, who live in an environment of chaos, whose lives are so filled with noise, with pain, with anger and confusion, simple chant and the quiet of silent prayer have become life-lines.

I think that my experience with the music and prayer of Taizé has begun to help me to pray in simplicity. And my experience of the Community of Taizé has helped me go beyond myself to embrace the world in all its complexity, in all its needs. In the end, I think my Taizé experience is helping me become a better Sister of Mercy.

On a video entitled, "Trust is at Hand" (not currently available in the United States), a young Indian girl speaks for all of us when she says how wonderful it is to find a community with whom we can share our questions, a community that does not give the answers but waits with us until we discover our own answers. This kind of patient but compassionately active waiting seems to me to be very much in tune with our Mercy charism.

That sense of acceptance, of patient waiting, is expressed in this prayer of Brother Roger:

Risen Christ, you take us with our hearts just as they are. Why think we must wait for our hearts to be changed before we go to you? You transfigure them.

With our thorns, you light a fire. The open wound in us is the place through which your love comes streaming. And within the very hurts themselves, you bring to fruition a communion with you. Your voice comes to rend our night, and the gateways of praise open up within us.

Songs and Prayers from Taizé, (GIA Publications, Inc, 1991): 24.

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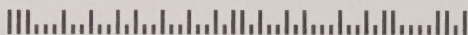
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